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Henry James and Italy

ROBERT L. GALE

IN HIS SHORT STORY "Four Meetings" (1877), published when he was thirty-four years of age, Henry James has his well-travelled narrator, who is really patterned after himself, speak as follows to an untravelled New England maiden:

"There's one [country] I love beyond any. I think you'd do the same."
Her gaze rested as on a dim revelation and then she breathed "Italy?"
"Italy," I answered softly too; and for a moment we communed over it.¹

The interchange may seem a little precious, but the narrator is being perfectly sincere, and so was Henry James. For thirty years later that thoroughly seasoned traveler wrote as follows to a friend, having concluded his final of many, many visits to Italy:

... incomparably the old *coquine* of an Italy is the most beautiful country in the world—of a beauty (and an interest and complexity of beauty) so far beyond any other that none other is worth talking about.²

And so it all was, through all the years for James, from his first almost drunken initiation into Italian beauty, both natural and man-made, to the very end of his days. He first descended upon Italy in September, 1869, and not only was the youth of twenty-six enthralled on his road to Rome by way of Venice and Florence—for here were paintings, buildings, statues, cities, ruins, and scenery almost beyond his dreams—but he was also puzzled. Why had his parents never taken him to this wondrous land during the several trips the entire

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¹ *The Novels and Tales of Henry James: The New York Edition* (26 vols., New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1907–1917), XVI, 272.

² *The Letters of Henry James*, ed. Percy Lubbock (2 vols., New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1920), II, 80.

cosmopolitan and deliberately rootless family made?³ The wealthy father, the devoted mother, and the five children had left New York in 1855 to begin a three-year residence in Europe, first settling in Geneva and then moving to London, Paris, and elsewhere. Hardly more than a year after their return to America, the family again moved to the Old World; but eleven months later they returned to the United States. The Civil War and the studies of the two oldest sons, William and Henry, combined to delay further travel until later. But from his very early days the future novelist's curiosity had been sharpened by paintings of Tuscan scenes which decorated the parlors of the family residence in New York and of which the accuracy was learnedly discussed before the imaginative boy.⁴ Therefore, in the formative years now ended, as young James was often to ponder, it was strange that Italy had remained an unopened chapter.

When he did descend in triumph on Rome, his response was instantaneous delight. In October, 1869, he wrote to his favorite brother, William, a most enthusiastic letter, part of which follows:

Here I am . . . in the Eternal City. . . . From midday to dusk I have been roaming the streets. . . . At last—for the first time—I live! It beats everything: it leaves the Rome of your fancy—your education—nowhere. . . . I went reeling and moaning thro' the streets, in a fever of enjoyment. In the course of four or five hours I traversed almost the whole of Rome and got a glimpse of everything—the Forum, the Coliseum (stupendissimo!), the Pantheon, the Capitol, St. Peter's, the Column of Trajan, the Castle of St. Angelo—all the Piazzas and ruins and monuments. The effect is something indescribable. . . . Even if I should leave Rome tonight I should feel that I have caught the keynote of its operation on the senses. . . . I have looked along . . . the Appian Way and seen . . . the Coliseum . . . I've trod the Forum and I have scaled the Capitol. I've seen the Tiber . . . From . . . a great chapel of St. Peter's I have heard . . . the papal choir . . . In fine I've seen Rome, and I shall go to bed a wiser man than I last rose . . .⁵

Those were juvenile intonations in part, to be sure, and the years of later travel and residence, and time itself, were to modify them sharply. For example, during his final visit to Rome, which he began in April, 1907, James complained in one letter of the "now highly-developed heat and dust and glare"⁶ and added in another letter, more

³ Robert C. LeClair, *Young Henry James: 1843-1870* (New York: Bookman Associates, 1955), p. 433.

⁴ Henry James, *A Small Boy and Others in Autobiography*, ed. F. W. Dupee (New York: Criterion Books, 1956), pp. 153-154.

⁵ *Letters*, I, 24-25.

⁶ *Ibid.*, II, 74.

violently and, I am certain, less literally, that “I feel that I shouldn’t care if I never saw the perverted place again.” Even his adored Florence he intemperately branded late in life as “vulgarized.”⁸ Indeed, throughout his career James often wrote that many regions in Italy sacred to him were being polluted by streams of tourists and falsely gilded by those purveying to them.⁹ Nonetheless, though his travel writings and private letters developed a note of wistfulness too quickly, James found rest, spiritual refreshment, and artistic inspiration in dozens of havens throughout the Italy he knew intimately, for he returned to its fountains again and again.

In fact, after his first visit in 1869, he returned to Italy again within three years in the company of his aunt and his sister. Family guide though he was, he still had time to observe Venice so closely that he wrote for magazine publication a fine little essay called “Venice: An Early Impression” (1872). A few months later James, alone again, left a Paris residence to settle for six delightful months in Rome, and more Italian sketches resulted, including the impressionistic “A Roman Holiday” and the haunting “The After-Season in Rome” (both 1873).¹⁰ These early pieces make clear both James’s accuracy and thoroughness of observation and his decided preference for solitude when in Italy.

Very early in 1874 James was obliged to leave Rome, not exclusively because, as he wrote a friend, that city had “too many distractions and a languifying atmosphere,”¹¹ but instead specifically because his brother William, visiting in Rome, had contracted malaria and withdrawn to Florence, where Henry followed to attend him. Florence, “the little treasure-city,”¹² as he called it, was not new to James at this time: as early as 1870 he had written that it was part of his

⁷ *Ibid.*, II, 79.

⁸ *Ibid.*, II, 81.

⁹ For example, James wrote from Venice in 1894 to his friend Henry Bennet Brewster in Rome that “these Italian cities, confound them, have now practically resolved themselves into dense Anglo-American watering places”; see Henry James, “Fourteen Letters,” *Botteghe Oscure*, XIX (Spring, 1957), 189. For comments on the destructive changes in “picturesque” Rome beginning shortly after James’s youthful visits there and continuing beyond his lifetime, see Henry Brewster, “Henry James and the Gallo-American,” *Botteghe Oscure*, XIX (Spring, 1957), 175–176.

¹⁰ The three sketches named above, and nineteen others, are collected and reprinted in Henry James, *Italian Hours* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1909).

¹¹ *Letters*, I, 35.

¹² *Italian Hours*, p. 171.

destiny.¹³ But later he was to remember 1874 and Florence with special fondness, since it was then and there that he had written much of *Roderick Hudson* (1875), his first important novel. Its preface, composed thirty years later for the collected edition, glows with memories of the “rather dusty but ever-romantic glare of Piazza Santa Maria Novella”¹⁴; in fact, as James admits, he was homesick for Florence when he was finishing *Roderick Hudson* in New York a few months later.

Later visits time and again only confirmed his love of Florence and its environs, and for other favorite Italian cities as well. In 1875 he decided¹⁵ to live in Europe for an indefinite period of time, and, to quote from one of his private notebooks, “Europe for me then meant simply Italy.” However, as he added at once, Italy, “lovely and desirable though it was, didn’t seem as a permanent residence, to lead to anything.”¹⁶ So he settled first in Paris, then in London, which was destined to be his home for forty years. Yet Italy drew him down often, for what he later complainingly called in a letter to William his “few dips.”¹⁷ Those “few dips” might have satisfied less demanding travellers: actually, James was in Italy for from weeks to months in 1869, 1872, 1873, 1874, 1877, 1879, 1880, 1881, 1884, 1887, 1888, 1890, 1892, 1894, 1899, and finally 1907. Venice, Florence, and Rome remained his favorite areas, and probably in that order.

Of his love for Florence and Rome I have perhaps adduced sufficient proof for now. Let me therefore turn for a moment to Venice, which James knew thoroughly from repeated residences there, usually at the Palazzo Barbaro. From the first he adored this city, with its many sounds and colors, its Grand Canal and San Marco, and its immortal Tintoretto, Carpaccio, and Bellini—“the dazzling Venetian trio,” as he described them in a splendid essay entitled “Venice”

¹³ Ralph Barton Perry, “Henry James in Italy,” *The Harvard Graduates’ Magazine*, XLI (June, 1933), 199.

¹⁴ Henry James, *The Art of the Novel: Critical Prefaces* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1934), p. 7.

¹⁵ See F. W. Dupee, “The Great Decision,” *Henry James, The American Men of Letters Series* ([New York]: William Sloane Associates, 1951), pp. 67–86.

¹⁶ *The Notebooks of Henry James*, ed. F. O. Matthiessen and Kenneth B. Murdock (New York: Oxford University Press, 1947), p. 24. James rejected Italy as a permanent home for two main reasons: its beauties were increasingly distracting to him in his work, and it was not closely enough connected with the late nineteenth-century Anglo-French literature in which he had been reared and of which it was his ambition to become a part.

¹⁷ *Letters*, I, 417.

(1882).¹⁸ The happiest of professional memories were also associated with the place: *The Portrait of a Lady*, started in Florence in 1880, was finished in Venice a year later.¹⁹ As James reminds himself in a private notebook,

It was a charming time; one of those things that don't repeat themselves; I seemed to myself to grow young again. The lovely Venetian spring came and went, and brought with it an infinitude of impressions, of delightful hours. I became passionately fond of the place, of the life, of the people, of the habits. . . . I lodged on the Riva, 4161, *quarto piano*. The view from my windows was *una bellezza*; the far-shining lagoon, the pink walls of San Giorgio, the downward curve of the Riva, the distant islands, the movement of the quay, the gondolas in profile. Here I wrote diligently every day and finished, or virtually finished, my novel.²⁰

And James tells us publicly, in his preface to *The Portrait of a Lady*, that the Venetian drama outside his windows was so splendid and many-voiced that it often wooed him from his desk.

. . . the waterside life, the wondrous lagoon spread before me, and the ceaseless human chatter of Venice came in at my windows, to which I seem to have been constantly driven, in the fruitless fidget of composition, as if to see whether, out of the blue channel, the ship of some right suggestion, of some better phrase, of the next happy twist of my subject, the next true touch for my canvas, mightn't come into sight. But I recall vividly enough that the response most elicited, in general, to these restless appeals was the rather grim admonition that romantic and historic sites, such as the land of Italy abounds in, offer the artist a questionable aid to concentration when they themselves are not to be the subject of it. They are too rich in their own life and too charged with their own meanings merely to help him out with a lame phrase; they draw him away from his small questions to their own greater one . . .²¹

The Venetian voice always called to James. He answered it often but apparently was never satisfied. It must have seemed siren-like to him in London in June of 1897, for example, when, surrounded by work, he wrote to a friend, "The voice of Venice, all this time, has called very loud. But it has been drowned a good deal in the click of the typewriter to which I dictate . . ."²² And after his final trip to Italy—which of course included a short stay at the Barbaro in Venice—he may have written petulantly of certain changes in some Italian cities,

¹⁸ *Italian Hours*, p. 24.

¹⁹ *Notebooks*, pp. 30–32.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

²¹ *The Art of the Novel*, pp. 40–41.

²² *Letters*, I, 256.

as has been stated, but not so of his changeless favorite: "I spent [he tells a correspondent] . . . two divine weeks at Venice—at the Barbaro. . . . Venice never seemed to me more loveable."²³ Perhaps while so writing he turned back the leaves of his memory and remembered that many works besides *The Portrait of a Lady* were intimately connected with lovable Venice. Several essays, for example "The Grand Canal" (1892) and "Casa Alvisi" (1902), concerned admired spots there.²⁴ A few stories were conceived, and others written, there. For two examples among more, "A London Life" (1888) was begun in a Venetian palace in "a room with a pompous Tiepolo ceiling and walls of ancient pale-green damask," as its preface tells us,²⁵ while the short novel *The Reverberator* (1888) grew from the notoriety attaching to a tactless American woman's exposure of Venetian society manners in a letter to a New York newspaper.²⁶ And still other stories and novels, if not conceived or born in Venice, have their beautiful settings there, as I shall indicate in a moment.

So Rome, Florence, and Venice delighted James; but so did countless other Italian centers of art and natural beauty. In Milan he admired the Cathedral, responded feelingly to Leonardo's "Last Supper," stood before Raphael's "Marriage of the Virgin" at the Brera, and so on.²⁷ Como and its environs inspired this simple statement: "One can't describe the beauty of the Italian lakes."²⁸ Perugia he called "the little City of the infinite View"²⁹; Narni too gave him a view, "exactly as like the bit of background by an Umbrian master as it ideally should have been"³⁰; Assisi was "a vignette out of some brown old missal."³¹ Late in life Subiaco was a thrill, for it was to James then "conventional 'wild' Italy raised to the highest intensity, and ideally, the sublimely conventional and wild, complete and supreme in itself,

²³ *Ibid.*, II, 81.

²⁴ Reprinted in *Italian Hours*.

²⁵ *The Art of the Novel*, p. 135.

²⁶ *Notebooks*, pp. 82–83; see also *The Art of the Novel*, pp. 183–186.

²⁷ *Italian Hours*, pp. 126–130. However, apropos of the last named painter, I should perhaps quote the following from James: ". . . if it came to a question of keeping or losing between half-a-dozen Raphaels and half-a-dozen things it would be a joy to pick out of the Academy [in Florence], I fear that, for myself, the memory of the Transfiguration, or indeed of the other Roman relics of the painter, wouldn't save the Raphaels"; *Italian Hours*, pp. 385–386.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 147.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 331.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 321.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 322.

without a disparity or a flaw.”³² Siena exerted a constant appeal, and of it James wrote two fine essays which more than thirty years separated.³³ For Ravenna he “had nothing but smiles—grave, reflective, philosophic smiles, . . . such as accord with the historic dignity, not to say the mortal sunny sadness, of the place”³⁴; he follows this effusion with solid descriptions of San Apollinare Nuovo, Santi Nazaro e Celso, the grave of Dante, and the Pineta. Finally, as we move south with him, we may read that the Bay of Naples struck James as “the last word,” that Capri oddly seemed “beautiful, horrible and haunted” with its “splendid couchant outline,” and that Naples proper was “at the best wild and weird and sinister” and yet during his last visit there was seemingly “seated more at her ease in her immense natural dignity.”³⁵ We have no time to do more than mention such other places, great and small, known and loved well by James, as Bologna, Castel Gandolfo, Cortona, Orvieto, Pisa, Pompeii, Spezia, Torino, Terracina, and Vallombrosa. All in all, therefore, it seems incredible that this richly fortunate traveller should write the following statement to his brother William in 1903:

I have practically never travelled at all . . . I’ve only gone for short periods, a few times—so much fewer than I’ve wanted—to Italy. . . . These visions I’ve had, one by one, all to give up—Spain, Greece, Sicily, any glimpse of the East . . .³⁶

The more important half of my subject remains to be considered now. Italy served Henry James best not by providing him subjects for travel sketches, charming or penetrating though the results might be, but instead by aiding his literary art in two subtler ways: Italy laid before James’s vision scene after scene upon which to cast his fictional actions, and Italy filled his mind with clustered images which he frequently drew upon for figurative description.

It is interesting that 28 of James’s 135 short stories and novels are cast entirely or partly in Italy, or include Italian characters. Sometimes the plot might have been transplanted to another land of James’s acquaintance—to England or America, to France, or even to Germany or Switzerland—with no vital change in effect. For example, “Benvolio” (1875), a youthful tale cast vaguely in Italy and

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 305–306.

³³ See the two parts of “Siena Early and Late,” in *Italian Hours*, pp. 345–372.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 469.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 481, 482, 497.

³⁶ *Letters*, I, 417.

mentioning “the cardinals, the princesses, the ruins, the warm southern tides which seemed the voice of history itself,”⁸⁷ is really a landless allegory showing the artistic temperament torn between art and love, and further torn between love of social prominence and love of intellectuality. So the setting is unimportant. But just as often the vibrantly pictured setting of a story is vital. Here are some examples. The achieved treasures of the Uffizi Gallery and the Pitti Palace in Florence combine to form a perfect foil for the ineffectual, would-be painter in “The Madonna of the Future” (1873), who delays and delays and never puts paint on canvas. Florence and Rome in *The Portrait of a Lady* are both solidly drawn; the former city is the beautiful place of Isabel Archer Osmond’s hideous marriage, and the latter the gorgeous scene of her regular residence. Fine imagery makes Naples a beautiful backdrop for the middle episodes of “Georgina’s Reasons” (1884)—Naples with its Bay which “would have looked painted if you had not been able to see the little movements of the waves,” and its Vesuvius crowned by its “breathing crest . . .”⁸⁸ The canals and villas of Venice are a fine feature of “The Aspern Papers” (1888), while the same rain-drenched, sun-gilded city, in which death finds Milly Theale, is impressionistically painted in the famous Jamesian final manner in *The Wings of the Dove* (1902).

Sometimes the Italian characters are central in their plots, as is Marco Valerio, the curious hero of “The Last of the Valerii” (1874), a young bearded Roman count who worships a statue of Juno exhumed from his villa grounds, until his perturbed American wife buries it again and brings Marco back from his pagan past. Just as often an Italian is a minor character in a work, as is the flexible, attractive Oronte, who in “The Real Thing” (1893) turns up in a British painter’s studio and becomes a unique valet-model. Curiously, there are no Italian villains in James’s fiction. Many readers might offer as a possible candidate Prince Amerigo, Maggie Verver’s wayward husband in *The Golden Bowl* (1904); but it is really the dangerous emotion of excessive pity which villainously drives all four central characters into their horrible tangle—fortunately pity can extricate them too.⁸⁹ Other readers might offer Giovanelli as a villain, since he

⁸⁷ *The Novels and Stories of Henry James: New and Complete Edition* (35 vols., London: Macmillan and Company, 1921–1923), XXIV, 352.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, XXV, 292.

⁸⁹ For this interpretation I am indebted to Osborn Andreas, *Henry James and the Expand-*

takes the titular heroine of *Daisy Miller* (1879) one night to the Colosseum, where she contracts the Roman *perniciosa* of which she dies. But the interpretation that Giovanelli sensed Daisy's unrequited love for the American narrator and therefore in frustration killed the girl, is, I think, unsatisfactory: Giovanelli is a somewhat oily opportunist but is hardly a murderer, and he too might have caught the fatal fever.

Only four times, I believe, does James have a character from one novel or story reappear in a later one. All four such personages are Italian, if we include Christina Light, who is half Italian and half American. Miss Light marries the Prince Casamassima late in the novel *Roderick Hudson*. Then, ten years later, James has her reappear in London—accompanied by her old friend Madame Grandoni, whom we have met in the earlier novel—as the unstable heroine of a new novel, *The Princess Casamassima* (1885), followed by her outraged husband, no longer fatuous as he was before but now brooding and almost tragic. The finest example, however, of the reappearing character is the magnificent Italian sculptor Gloriani, the only personage to figure in three of James's fictional pieces. We first see him in *Roderick Hudson*, offering encouragement to young Hudson in Rome. Next we meet him in *The Ambassadors* (1903), where he is even more experienced, even more wondrous, and is thrilling to the hero Strether because of his so obviously having lived: it is in Gloriani's Paris garden that Strether tells a young American to live all he can. And we see the shining sculptor a final time in the short story "The Velvet Glove" (1909), in which he is still attracting all manner of art folk to his famous Paris salon.

If there are several Italian heroes in James's fiction, there are also a few Italian victims. In addition to the Prince Casamassima, whose wife makes his life a misery, we may sympathize with the Count Gemini, whose wife is the sister of Gilbert Osmond, the effete villain of *The Portrait of a Lady*; Amy Gemini has her virtues, as for example her courage in warning Isabel, but those virtues do not include marital fidelity. Another victim is the charmingly drawn, sweetly named Angelo Beati, in the unimportant early tale called "Adina" (1874). An American named Scrope cheats Angelo out of a valuable

ing Horizon: A Study of the Meaning and Basic Themes of James's Fiction (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1948), pp. 73–74.

topaz; when Angelo learns the truth, he take the simple revenge of winning and eloping with Scrope's fiancée Adina. And in "Miss Gunton of Poughkeepsie" (1900), the heroine Lily Gunton seeks to humble the proud family of her fiancé, a Roman prince, by forcing her prospective mother-in-law to take the first step socially, that of sending her a written invitation to call. The pressured woman does so finally, but too late: the engagement has been broken. The prince, however, is not a completely innocent victim, for James hints that possibly his main concern has been with Miss Gunton's money.

Other strictly Italian characters in the fiction are few: in fact, of an incomplete list of just fewer than 350 characters in James, as printed in one book,⁴⁰ only nine are Italians. While these totals are not complete, the proportion is undoubtedly accurate.

More of James's characters are American, English, or French; for, just as James knew the English and French languages much better than he knew Italian,⁴¹ so he also knew more intimately American, British, and French society. And, although Italy appealed to him strongly from first to last, it should be mentioned that as the decades advanced James turned more and more from Italian settings for fiction to settings provided by other lands. In fact, of his novels and stories set at least partly in Italy or having an Italian personage or two, nearly half are to be dated before 1880, and all but a few before 1890, although he was writing fiction until a short time before his death in 1916. Two magnificent exceptions to what I have been stating are the late novels *The Wings of the Dove* and *The Golden Bowl*.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 175–179.

⁴¹ James's French, in the words of one of his biographers, "was more than good, it was phenomenal" (Dupee, *Henry James*, p. 91): James wrote letters in French (see, for example, in *Letters*, I, 108–109, and in *The Selected Letters of Henry James*, ed. Leon Edel [New York: Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, 1955], pp. 147–148, two to Alphonse Daudet, whose *Port Tarascon* he translated into English) and mastered the French theatre of his day (see his letter to William James, July 29, 1876—"I know the Théâtre Français by heart!"—[*Selected Letters*, p. 51], and his essay "The Théâtre Français," in *French Poets and Novelists* [London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1878], pp. 316–344). His Italian was much less fluent, for he confesses once attending Carlo Goldoni's *I Quattro Rustighi* and "but half follow[ing]" its Venetian dialect (*Italian Hours*, p. 293). However, Edel writes that "When in Italy, he occasionally moved in Italian literary circles, as his essays on D'Annunzio and Matilde Serao suggest" (Edel, ed., *Selected Letters*, p. 137; also see Brewster, *op. cit.*, p. 175, and James, "Fourteen Letters," *op. cit.*, p. 191). It is interesting to observe the frequency with which James dots both his letters and his notebooks with *ecco's*, *basta's*, *pazienza's*, *speriamo's*, and the like; but when he is seriously questioning a literary problem in the privacy of his notebook he uses, if not English, only French, often even to the extent of calling himself *mon bon*. Finally, James knew some German but appears to have disliked the language (see Le-Clair, *op. cit.*, pp. 312–320).

It almost seems that James, feeling sorry at the turn of the century for having neglected his beloved Italy, turned back to her penitently.

Through his entire career James constantly paid Italy the subtle tribute of confessing, in the figurative imagery of his fiction, that visions of Italian art had sunk deep into his unconscious mind, there to remain until needed for pictorial or illuminating comparisons. To me James's metaphors and similes which derive from deep love and thorough knowledge of the old Italian masters comprise a surer proof of his tender love of Italy than most of the dozens and dozens of splendid pages he devoted in his numerous Italian sketches to literal descriptions of masterworks. First let us briefly consider these literal laudatory descriptions and then the greater homage to the masters in the form of figurative comparisons based on their art.

James the travel-writer dealt rather often in superlatives and rhapsodies when he described the art works he saw. Thus, in Venice Tintoretto's "Rape of Europa" is "the happiest picture in the world," Bellini's work in the sacristy of the Frari "seems painted with molten gems, which have only been clarified by time," and Carpaccio's "St. Jerome" at S. Giorgio Schiavoni is "a pearl of sentiment, and . . . a ruby of colour."⁴² In Rome we find James writing that Michelangelo's "Piéta" is "indeed to my sense the rarest artistic *combination* of the greatest things the hand of man has produced,"⁴³ and describing the Villas Borghese, Mellini, and Medici in similar hyperbolic terms. From Assisi he reports of Giotto—"Meagre, primitive, undeveloped, he yet is immeasurably strong . . . The something strange that troubles and haunts us in his work springs . . . from a kind of fierce familiarity."⁴⁴ Among the Florentines James gives high praise to Botticelli—"the only Florentine save Leonardo and Michael in whom the impulse was original and the invention rare"⁴⁵—but reserves his love for Andrea del Sarto, "that most touching of painters who is not one of the first."⁴⁶ He calls the Uffizi "the great central treasure-chamber of the town"⁴⁷; but the Pitti he regards as merely "splendid rather than interesting,"⁴⁸ with its array of masterpieces which "jostle each other

⁴² *Italian Hours*, pp. 31, 33, 36.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 209.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 325.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 385.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 185.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 384.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 400.

... [and] ... fatigue our imagination.”⁴⁹ Nonetheless, of Veronese’s “Baptism of Christ” in the Pitti James writes, “We ask ourselves whether painting as such can go further.”⁵⁰ In the Cathedral at Siena he admires the library and the sacristy decorations of Pinturicchio—“coolest and freshest and signally youngest and most matutinal (as distinguished from merely primitive or crepuscular) of painters.”⁵¹

But the supreme homage that James the fiction-writer pays to the old Italian masters lies in many of his metaphors and similes. Of more than 400 painting images in his fiction,⁵² some 70 directly name more than 30 painters. Of these 30, the Italians have a clear majority, with Titian, Veronese, Michelangelo, and Raphael⁵³ leading in that order. If such indirect statistics are at all reliable, Titian was a beloved favorite of James’s, for in his *Portrait of a Lady*, for example, he praises Titian wondrously by having a friend praise the heroine Isabel thus:

“A character like that,” he said to himself—“a real little passionate force to see at play is the finest thing in nature. It’s finer than the finest work of art—than a Greek bas-relief, than a great Titian, than a Gothic cathedral.”⁵⁴

An attractive woman in James’s posthumously published novel *The Sense of the Past* (1917) is said to resemble “an Italian princess of the *cinque-cento*, and Titian or the grand Veronese might, as the phrase is, have signed her image.”⁵⁵ More colorfully, a helpful friend regards Milly Theale’s Venetian *palazzo* in *The Wings of the Dove* as “‘... a Veronese picture, as near as can be—with me as the inevitable dwarf, the small blackamoor, put into a corner of the foreground for effect.’”⁵⁶ Also, James often achieves particular desired aims by using lesser-known Italian painters in his imagery: thus, one angular woman is said to resemble a portrait in a Ghirlandaio fresco⁵⁷; a Utopian dream valley is like “some old Italian picture, some Carpaccio or some early Tuscan”⁵⁸; Roderick Hudson is called “a Pinturic-

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 383–384.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 406.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 365.

⁵² See my “Art Imagery in Henry James’s Fiction,” *American Literature*, XXIX (March, 1957), 53–56.

⁵³ However, for an adverse opinion of Raphael see footnote 27 above.

⁵⁴ *New York Edition*, III, 86.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, XXVI, 7.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, XX, 206.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, III, 372.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, XVI, 252.

chio-figure . . . come to life"⁵⁹; and so on. James could hardly praise his favorite Italian painters more highly than by this often-used device of making their works the basis of numerous imagistic comparisons in his own sacredly executed canvases.

The infrequent sculpture images in James do not usually suggest that the carved originals are specifically Italian. Only one such figure points to a definite sculptured work as a source; Marco Valerio, in "The Last of the Valerii," is said to have a head "like some of the busts in the Vatican. . . . a head as massively round as that of the familiar bust of the Emperor Caracalla, and covered with the same dense sculptural crop of curls."⁶⁰ In *The Golden Bowl*, famous for containing James's notable final style, we find proof of its author's continued love of Florence and Rome. Charlotte Stant's lithe arms seem to her lover Prince Amerigo to have "the completely rounded, the polished slimness that Florentine sculptors in the great time had loved and of which the apparent firmness is expressed in their old silver and old bronze." And Maggie, heroine of the same novel, has in the eyes of her devoted father "the appearance of some slight slim draped 'antique' of Vatican or Capitoline hills, . . . set in motion . . . and yet . . . keeping still the quality, the perfect felicity, of the statue."⁶¹

And so we must all agree that Henry James, distinguished American novelist, knew well and abundantly praised his beloved Italy. Other Jameses did too; and when the sister Alice died in 1892 the brother William reverently consigned her ashes to a Florentine urn on which were graven lines from Dante, and placed all in the cemetery at Cambridge, Massachusetts. One of Henry James's finest passages of writing, intended when penned in 1905 for his private notebook only, records his reverent memory of a visit to the cemetery. With it we may close.

Everything was there, everything *came*; the recognition, stillness, the strangeness, the pity and the sanctity and the terror, the breath-catching passion and the divine relief of tears. William's inspired transcript, on the exquisite little Florentine urn of Alice's ashes, William's divine gift to us, and to *her*, of the Dantean lines—

*Dopo lungo esilio e martiro
Viene a questa pace—*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, I, 191.

⁶⁰ *New and Complete Edition*, XXVI, 4.

⁶¹ *New York Edition*, XXIII, 46–47, 187.

took me at the throat by its penetrating *rightness*, that it was as if one sank down on one's knees in a kind of anguish of gratitude before something for which one had waited with a long, deep *ache*. But why do I write of the all unutterable and the all abysmal? Why does my pen not drop from my hand on approaching the infinite pity and tragedy of all the past? It does, poor helpless pen, with what it meets of the ineffable, what it meets of the cold Medusa-face of life, of all the life *lived*, on every side. *Basta, Basta!*⁶²

⁶² *Notebooks*, p. 321.